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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON ISSUES RELATED

TO THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

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Compiled by the  
Biblical Research Office

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I. Hermeneutical (principles of interpretation) considerations.

- A. What are the implications of the 2,000-year gap between the New Testament and our time, between their culture and our culture?
- B. What implication does God's accommodation in revelation and implementation hold for establishing the ideal?
  1. Does the Bible advocate an ideal which is not always implemented within its own pages?
    - a. Would the level of implementation of the divorce laws in Old Testament times serve as a norm for divorce in our time?
    - b. Would the level of implementation of the position of slaves in New Testament society serve as a norm for our time (the New Testament shows no urgency in the matter of emancipation of slaves)?
  2. Would an accurate description of first century Christianity automatically be the authoritative standard for the church through the ages?
  3. Does the treatment of women in the New Testament speak to the ideal position of women or to God's condescension and accommodation to mankind?
  4. Is it God's plan to lead His people to an ever higher ideal?
- C. Does a distinction need to be made between "before God" and "among men and church and society"?
- D. To what extent does our present cultural situation play a part in the question of the ordination of women? Is it primarily a question of the times in which we live?
- E. Is there anything the church can say to the contemporary world that is not particularly spelled out in the Bible and yet is based upon Bible principles?

II. Textual considerations.

A. 1 Corinthians 11:3.

1. "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." (New American Standard Bible, hereinafter abbreviated NASB)

2. God is the head of Christ yet both are equal. Would this not leave open the possibility of the equality of female with male even though man is the head of woman?
3. By analogy, if the fact that man is head of the woman precludes the woman from ministry and ordination, would the fact that Christ is head of man not also exclude man from ministry and ordination? And again by analogy, what is the implication that God is the head of Christ if headship, in the case of women, means a denial of ministry and ordination. Would this analogy not lead to serious theological problems?
4. Is it proper to apply a text dealing with the behavior of women in a specific church situation (Corinth) to the question of ordination of women?

B. Ephesians 5:22.

1. "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." (NASB)
2. Working from the analogy in the context, if headship of man implies the non-ordination of women, what are the implications of the headship of Christ for the role of the church and of the men in the church?
3. In what way might a passage dealing specifically with marriage relationships be applied to the ordination or non-ordination of women?

C. 1 Timothy 5:14.

1. "Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach." (NASB)
2. Is the apostle writing to a specific situation in a specific location? (Compare 1 Cor. 7:39, 40.)
3. Would Paul's counsel necessarily provide the widows with the opportunity of remarriage? If remarriage occurred, would this necessarily provide the widow with the ability to have children? Are there not practical and physical limitations even to the solution that the apostle suggests would be best for young widows?
4. In what way might a text dealing with remarriage of young widows be applied to the ordination or non-ordination of women? If this text dealing with the remarriage of young widows means the non-ordination of young widows, would it, by its silence on older widows, approve their ordination?

D. 1 Peter 3:1.

1. "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives." (NASB)
2. In what way might counsel regarding the submission of wives to their husbands, even non-member husbands, be applied to the question of ordination or non-ordination of women? (cf. 7T47)
3. Likewise, what would the passage in 1 Peter 3:7 say regarding the ordination of women? "Grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life." (NASB)
4. This passage introduced by "in the same way" is preceded by a passage dealing with the relationship between slaves and their master. If one were to argue for the subordination of women on the basis of 1 Peter 3:1, would it not be consistent to also argue for slavery on the basis of 1 Peter 2:18-25.

E. Does the subordinate role given to women in specific Biblical instances equal non-ordination of women?

F. The argument from the choice of males for apostleship.

1. Are either men or women being considered today to fill an apostolic office? Is there not a once-and-for-allness in that office? Thus are we not dealing with apostleship rather than with the ministry, and is the limitation today not just as much upon men as it is upon women?
2. By what principle of interpretation could the choice of men as apostles be made binding for all times and interpreted to mean men only in the ministry?
  - a. How can we know that the point of the choice of disciples was the non-ordination of women?
  - b. Would it not be necessary to demonstrate that Christ was acting upon a principle valid for all time?
  - c. Would it not also be necessary to demonstrate that that principle had application to the ministry?
  - d. Is everything in the life of Christ binding in a normative way? For example, Christ was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6). Is His mission to Judah only, binding for all times? (In spite of Christ's limited mission it is interesting to note that His teachings point to the world-wide mission of the church.)

- e. Does this not indicate that the record of a specific Biblical act or choice is not necessarily meant to be the norm for all time?
- G. The argument from the choice of males for the priesthood.
1. What was the position of women in Old Testament times?
  2. Considering the role of women in pagan worship, what association would have come to mind among the heathen had women been involved in the Old Testament worship service?
  3. To what extent would we care to consider the role of women in Old Testament times to be normative for present-day man (their status in marriage, divorce, family and civil affairs)?
- H. Does not the New Testament itself contain elements which point beyond its own level of implementation?
1. 1 Corinthians 11:11, 12: "However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God." (NASB)
  2. Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, / there is neither slave nor free man, / there is neither male nor female; / for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (NASB)
  3. Is it not our intention that all three of these opposing pairs have the same potential for implementation in the life and structure of the church? Is not the removal of these barriers intended to be realized in the life of the church?
  4. What was the impact of the teachings of Jesus on the status of women? Would it be safe to set a date at which this "emancipation" process was to be arrested--end of the Old Testament, end of the New Testament, 1844, 1860?
- I. Would the possible role of women as prophetesses say anything about the possible role of women as ordained ministers? How would one compare the two roles as to level, honor, responsibility, and appropriateness?
- J. What are the implications of the fact that the New Testament provides no special argumentation about the ministry, when it comes to the role of women?
1. When the role of women is at issue, there is no reference to the male pattern of apostleship.

2. Never is subordination of women illustrated by a statement indicating that they are not to be ordained.
  3. Since the New Testament nowhere argues for the subordination of women on the basis of non-ordination, and since the New Testament in fact does not even deal with the question of the ordination of women, it is to be questioned whether the topic of ordination of women can be dealt with separately from the question of the emancipation of women. The question of the ordination of women is thus not a question about offices, but a question about right relationships between man and woman in Christ, whether it applies to secular or religious life. The ordination of women cannot be treated as a special problem apart from emancipation of women since there is no indication that the New Testament sees it as such.
- K. Does the creation of man give any indication of God's original plan for mankind?
1. Does the phrase "let us make man in our image, after our likeness" imply equality just as there is equality in the Godhead?
  2. Was the change in the relationship between men and women after the fall a change intended from the beginning by God or was it the result of sin?
  3. Is there any significance in the fact that Adam did not name his wife Eve until the time reported in Genesis 3 (the act of naming indicates authority over)?
  4. Is it a part of God's plan to restore in His people the image of God and to bring mankind back to the original perfect relationships that were given him at creation? If so, should the church be moving toward that restoration now?
- L. On the basis of Biblical evidence, would the apostolic or modern church look with displeasure on the new social, economic, and leadership roles of women in our society?
- M. For a fuller treatment of the Biblical view of the role of women, see the paper already presented from Frank Holbrook and the articles by Maybelle Vandermark in the March 16 and 23, 1972, issues of the Review and Herald. For a comparable study of the role of women in the writings of Ellen G. White see the paper by Mrs. Keith Anderson. Is it not significant that not one of the above papers finds any ground for prohibiting the ordination of women to the ministry, although cautious and prayerful approach to implementation is indicated.

III. Theological considerations.

- A. The study of the ordination of women must be viewed in conjunction with a study of a theology of ordination. What is the purpose and meaning of ordination?
  - 1. Does ordination create any changes in the equality of mankind or does it presuppose any differences in man's equality?
  - 2. Is ordination a recognition of God's special call and of the individual's acceptance of that call?
  - 3. Is Ellen G. White's description of the possible function of women within the church in harmony with the function of an ordained individual?
- B. Does the subordinate role given to women in specific instances in the Bible say anything about the inherent nature of women?
- C. If women are inherently of a lower order than men, it would seem that Christ should have become a woman rather than a man, in harmony with His plan to save both men and women.
- D. What are the implications of the role of Ellen G. White and women in the Bible as prophets for the ordination of women? If God was willing to set apart a woman as His special representative in the 19th century, should the church be reluctant to set women apart by ordination for special service in God's cause in the 20th century?

IV. Consideration of principles involved.

- A. What implications does the concept of the equality of all believers hold for the ordination of women?
- B. What implications for the ordination of women resides in the concept of making maximum use of all talents within the church? (See attached Ellen G. White statement.)

V. Some administrative considerations.

- A. What would be the reaction of the field to the ordination of women?
- B. What method would be used to gradually implement the ordination of women in the church?

- C. Types of roles available for ordained women in the church:
    - 1. Counselors
    - 2. Chaplains
    - 3. Bible workers
    - 4. Sabbath School, Education, the Home and Youth leadership roles, etc.
    - 5. In larger churches, members of the pastoral staff.
    - 6. In smaller churches, it may even be possible to place a woman as the pastor.
    - 7. Health evangelists.
  - D. What attitude would be taken toward unmarried women, and women whose husbands are not ordained?
  - E. What type of woman would be chosen for ordination--it would take someone who recognized that she was plowing new ground and who would be careful not to offend by her actions. (Ironically, in many cases this would probably be the type of woman who is not presently seeking ordination, if indeed any actually are, for themselves.)
  - F. Should the possible ordination of women in some parts of the world field await approval of all parts of the world field before any implementation takes place anywhere?
  - G. Will the change in relations between male and female take place in the church or in the world? Will the church lead or will it be led?
- VI. Consideration of approaches.
- A. A thorough study should be made from the theological standpoint.
  - B. A thorough study should be made from an administrative standpoint.
  - C. A meeting such as that held at Camp Cumby-Gay where the theological and administrative viewpoints are blended together and where sufficient time is available for more complete consideration would be ideal.



- D. Women should be represented as fully as possible in all of the above considerations in order that a realistic appraisal of the situation might be obtained and a workable solution proposed. It would also be only fair to include women on committees dealing with the role of women in the church. (Compare committees on issues of social equality.)
- E. The larger issue is the position of women within the church.
  - 1. Only a small number of women would be involved in the question of ordination, whereas the majority of women church members would be involved in the question of their position within the church.
  - 2. The question of the ordination of women cannot be separated theologically from the question of the role of women within the church.